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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000900

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM HO

SUBJECT: TFH01: AMBASSADOR URGES REGIME SUPPORTERS TO
PERSUADE MICHELETTI TO SIGN SAN JOSE ACCORD

Classified By: AMBASSADOR HUGO LLORENS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

¶11. (C) Summary. A small group of de facto regime supporters, who met with the Ambassador on September 7 at his request, were in agreement that Honduran society is deeply polarized and that a solution to the country's crisis must be found within the framework of the San Jose Accord. However, several meeting participants expressed concern that President Jose Manuel "Mel" Zelaya cannot be trusted to comply with the Accord. Former President Carlos Roberto Flores, who also attended the meeting, said an exiled President Zelaya is more of a threat than a restored Zelaya whose actions are constricted by the Accord's provisions. The Ambassador asked the businessmen to deliver the message to the de facto regime that U.S. patience has reached its limit and that they should sign the San Jose Accord. End Summary.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador met on September 7 with eleven de facto regime supporters including Honduras' leading businessmen and other regime supporters and asked them to make clear to the de facto regime that U.S. patience is running thin and that it is time to sign the San Jose Accord. The participants included: business leaders Miguel Facusse (Honduras' wealthiest man), Antonio Tavel (telecommunications magnate), Jorge Canahuati (media magnate), Juan Ferrera (President of the anti-corruption commission), Emilio Larach (owner of largest wholesale and retail hardware business), Norman Garcia (Investment consultant and former Ambassador to the U.S.), Abraham Bennatton (Director of Honduran Confederation of Business), as well as former President Carlos Flores, and Micheletti Commission members Arturo Corrales and Vilma Morales. The DCM, Political and Economic Counselor also attended the meeting. The Ambassador told the group that the United States supports the peaceful restoration of democratic and constitutional order in Honduras with President Zelaya's return as President to finish his term. He explained that many in the international community, including the U.S., are coming to the conclusion that Micheletti regime officials are not negotiating in good faith and are attempting to run out the clock on Zelaya. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. recognizes the complicated nature of the actions that led to the June 28 coup d'etat. He informed the businessmen that Costa Rican President Arias is open to putting in the Accord guarantees regarding President Zelaya's compliance with the Accord, assuming these proposals are serious. The Ambassador added that if Micheletti agreed to sign the Accord he would still have an opportunity to restore his personal reputation with the international community.

¶13. (C) Several of the businessmen noted the importance of finding a solution that is consistent with Honduran law. One participant highlighted that President Zelaya's return must be reconciled with the fact that he is no longer recognized as the legitimate president of the country. Many participants remarked that Honduras has been a close ally of the United States and told the Ambassador that the U.S. should play the role of "mediator" in the San Jose negotiations. Several said that the San Jose Accord is currently too vague and expressed concern that the amnesty granted by the Accord could be used by President Zelaya and members of his government to avoid facing charges of corruption.

¶14. (C) Several participants pointed out that polls show that 70 to 80 percent of Hondurans oppose President Zelaya's return and expressed concern that his restoration would bring about public disturbances. (Note: Polls we've seen suggest the country is evenly divided between opponents and supporters of Zelaya's return. End Note.) They warned that if President Zelaya is allowed to return he will take measures to impede national elections from taking place as scheduled on November 29.

¶15. (C) Former President Flores countered that the government that is elected in November will face an incredible challenge if the international community does not recognize it. He described the San Jose Accord as a life preserver that the U.S. provided to the de facto regime. President Flores noted the violence and demonstrations that have plagued Honduras over the last few weeks and accused President Zelaya of orchestrating them. He warned that Zelaya may be more

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dangerous outside of Honduras than if he were restored to power. He said an exiled President Zelaya will incite his followers to disrupt the elections so that they are flawed or do not take place at all. President Flores argued that it would be better to allow Zelaya to return to Honduras with his powers severely curtailed by the provisions of the San Jose Accord. He suggested that the de facto regime should present President Arias with a list of guarantees it deems necessary to ensure President Zelaya's compliance with the Accord. Business magnate Miguel Facusse, a strong supporter of the Accord, echoed Flores' words and argued that a failure to sign the Accord would lead to Honduras' isolation.

¶16. (C) The Ambassador urged the group to send a delegation to de facto regime head Roberto Micheletti to urge him to sign the Accord immediately and to pass the message that U.S. patience was thin. Following the meeting, four of the group arranged to meet with Micheletti that evening. Facusse told the Ambassador that he planned to meet separately with Micheletti.

¶17. (C) Comment: The business group clearly has been affected by recently announced U.S. measures against the regime. They were more open to discussing compromise than in previous meetings, and the tone was much more civil. It remains to be seen whether our pressure can overcome their fear of Zelaya's return and, if they do accept the need to compromise, whether or not they are able to sway Micheletti.

LLORENS